

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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CSW67: African Countries Agree on Common Position to harness technology and innovation for empowerment of women and girls

Building inclusive innovation and technology ecosystems must be at the heart of efforts to leverage the potential of innovation and technology to support the economic, social, and political development of women and girls in Africa. These were some of the key issues highlighted at the 67th pre-Commission on the Status of Women in Africa (Pre-CSW67) Ministerial consultations convened by the African Union Commission in partnership with UN Women, ECA, ITU, and UNDP from 29 November to 1 December 2022.

Consultations heard that technology and innovation have proved a positive disruptor in Africa, accelerating progress in terms of financial inclusion, creating new jobs, improving access to healthcare, providing information on agricultural practices, and opening virtual spaces for citizens to engage on governance concerns.

Delegates further noted that while technology and innovation are being hailed as crucial means to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the statistics on access, beneficiaries and who influences their development are pointing to disparities between and among the sexes. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in Africa, women account for only 24% of the population using the internet, while men account for 35% of users. Thus, delegates stressed that ensuring that these technological developments do not widen the digital gender divides was crucial.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the ministerial segment of the consultations, Ms. Prudence Ngwenya, Ag. Director, African Union Commission – Women, Gender and Youth Directorate called for the Common Africa Position to be translated into implementable actions and mainstreamed into the work that governments are doing towards achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, **“Empowering women and girls through the provision of meaningful access to the internet and innovative technologies could undoubtedly provide them with opportunities to start businesses, and to access education, health, social as well as financial services.”** said Ms. Ngwenya

In his remarks, addressing the pre-CSW Expert Consultations participants, Dr. Maxime Houinato, UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa called for efforts to be made to ensure that the interests of African women and girls shape the values and principles that underly governance of technology and innovation. **“CSW 67 provides an opportunity for Africa to influence the global discourse on digital cooperation, to ensure that technology and innovation can accelerate economic growth, while fairly distributing the benefits to African women and**

girls as well as reshaping sociocultural norms to create a more equal and just world for them,”. said Dr. Houinato.

Contributing to the opening session, Ms. Edlam Abera Yemeru, Director a.i. Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) said: **“We know digital technologies offer huge opportunities to transform the lives of people. At the same time, we know that the risk of women being left behind is significant. We need to make sure that women and girls have equal access to technology.”**

The 67th Pre-CSW Africa Consultations on “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, which hosted both experts and ministers, reviewed and adopted the Common Africa Position for CSW67 and made recommendations on the following aspects:

- Access to digital tools, the internet, and relevant content for women and girls
- Data availability to support the gender-responsive innovation
- Human and Institutional Capacity in support of technology and innovation for women and girls
- Human rights and agency
- Digital safety for women and children
- Regional digital cooperation

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) remains instrumental in promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

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